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SUBJECT: DEPORTEE ISSUE CONTINUES IN THE NEWS

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Fed by Parliamentary bickering involving opposition attacks on the government's crime record, and media sensationalism, the deportee issue is experiencing one of its period upswings. The Embassy, through an op-ed piece from the Ambassador has pushed back, seeking to introduce some facts into an often ill-informed and emotional discussion. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) The latest go-around on deportees began in late January when National Security Minister Martin Joseph briefed Parliament on the overall crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. As part of his presentation, he noted that 156 out of the 2,000 persons deported here over the last six years had been arrested locally for criminal offenses. This led to some opposition posturing and press play, but it was relatively constrained.

13. The latest upsurge of deportee interest, though, began in early February when The Guardian newspaper published a long article charging that deportees arrived "in jail clothes and slippers." Their treatment at the hands of the U.S., the article continued, contributed directly to deportees returning to a life of crime once back in Trinidad and Tobago. A series of further articles and editorials on the subject (one on "senior citizen" deportees) followed, some pieces being more temperate than others. Not to be outdone, opposition MPs again raised this issue in late February. Specifically, Subhas Panday referred to deportees in a debate, lambasting the GOTT for allegedly failing to monitor deportees once they are back home.

14. (U) Seeking to inject factual information into the deportee debate, the Ambassador drafted an op-ed published in the Express newspaper on March 4. Drawing on DHS provided information, the Ambassador made clear that deportees are not sent back to their home country in jail garb and are treated humanely and with their rights protected throughout the deportee process. Drawing on his own empirical research, the Ambassador also pointed out "the average number of deportees charged per year (in T&T for criminal offenses) from 2005 through 2007 is 40 compared with 12 in the previous three years. Therefore, I recalculated the contribution of deportees to the number of prosecutions assuming 4,432 prosecutions per year, the annual average from 2002 through 2004...the deportee contribution was a measly 0.9 per cent (of persons prosecuted for criminal acts)."

15. (U) Though the Express published only a lightly edited version of the Ambassador's op-ed, the Guardian chose to ignore the thrust of the piece and "reported" that the U.S. had confirmed "Deportees commit most of the crime." We have sent a subsequent letter to the Guardian to ask it correct the misimpression left by its article.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The deportee issue continues to be one where emotion often trumps the facts. We will continue to fight the good fight on this, but it almost assuredly will remain a topic of both public and private discussion. END COMMENT.

AUSTIN